

**REDRESS WA — DERBY LEPROSARIUM**

*Grievance*

**MS J. FARRER (Kimberley)** [9.13 am]: My grievance this morning is about the Redress WA scheme. Although the Redress WA scheme closed before I was elected, I have received many letters from Kimberley constituents asking to have it reopened, most importantly because of some of the stories that need to be heard and acknowledged.

**Dr K.D. Hames:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I cannot hear the member very well. Can we have the microphone turned up?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes. Can we have someone turn the microphone up? You have a volume knob there, too, member for Kimberley. Does that work? Okay, have another go; we will see how it is.

**Ms J. FARRER:** My grievance this morning is on the Redress WA scheme.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is good; thank you.

**Ms J. FARRER:** Although we know that the Redress scheme has been closed, I have had many letters from Kimberley constituents pleading for the scheme to be reassessed and, most importantly, for their stories to be heard and acknowledged.

I refer to the leprosarium at Bungarun near Derby, a state medical facility funded with a federal subsidy way back in 1936, and eventually closed in 1986. During that 50-year period, people suffering from Hansen's disease were forcibly placed there. They felt they had no choice. It affected families and children. Families were prevented from visiting patients. There are accounts of abuse against Aboriginal women and children. Leprosy patrols by police swept through the Kimberley removing Aboriginal people suspected of having leprosy and isolating them in Derby at the leprosarium, which resulted in their losing connection with outside society.

**Dr K.D. Hames:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I apologise but the member is hard to hear. There is a conversation from—no offence, member—but the member for Kimberley is really hard to hear, and they are talking; it is a very important issue.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, minister. Yes, can the conversation be kept to none, thank you, unless you want to do it outside.

**Ms J. FARRER:** This isolation that occurred and the over-policing of Aboriginal people has always been a feature of Australian history. It remains a critical issue in Western Australia, where Indigenous people have continued to experience high incarceration rates.

Maxine Armstrong—she has asked me to use her name—is a respected leader in her community. She is one of many who missed out on the Redress scheme. She told me that she did not apply for the scheme as she was not aware of it. When she did hear about it, the closing time for applications had already passed. Maxine, along with two of her sisters, was placed in Bungarun near Derby at a very early age. During their stay, they suffered mental and emotional trauma and she has, like many, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Children who were placed in the leprosarium were separated from their parents. Adults were separated from their children. She witnessed her sister in a hysterical state when she could not return home to her parents. Maxine's mother was forced to leave her daughters in the institution in an unsafe environment, which today we are still concerned about. Acknowledgement that these people suffered trauma is essential for society as a whole to heal. These survivors need to be acknowledged and compensated.

At a young age, Maxine's sisters gave birth to children at Bungarun and during labour were told to keep quiet or they would be punished. The babies were taken from their mothers immediately after birth and the mothers were not allowed to hold or even look at their babies before they were taken away and given to state institutions, such as the Beagle Bay mission. Three of Maxine's children were institutionalised. There are systemic failings in the way governments, past and present, have attempted to address the pain experienced by so many who were placed in government institutions. It is shameful, dishonourable, unethical and un-Australian.

It has been tortuous for many people trying to make claims. Many come forward and tell their deepest secrets, reliving the traumatic childhoods that they were powerless to prevent, and receive nothing in return. A large majority have not received any counselling to deal with their post-traumatic stress disorder. This has created an intergenerational shame factor and mental illness, which is causing all kinds of problems within our communities, towns and even here in our great capital city. They feel forgotten.

I call upon the government to acknowledge the huge suffering people have experienced over this time. I want to acknowledge Maxine and all the others who spent time at Bungarun and other state institutions. We need to

facilitate a form of healing that provides an opportunity for the whole family to move forward. They need to be shown support, compassion and understanding. There needs to be full-time counselling in every community throughout the Kimberley. Many people missed out. Our focus needs to be on the delivery of information to all remote communities throughout the state so that people can utilise these types of schemes.

I know the scheme is closed, but if the minister is willing to travel to my electorate, I will devote as much time as it takes to guide him around. Each time I go back to the Kimberley, people ask me, “Why has this scheme been closed?” There are many stories that people want to talk about because they have suffered so much. It is about time that we look at why our young people are offending, reoffending, being institutionalised, and put in prisons. This is the way that people have been treated over time and it has just rubbed off on children. I guess it is a matter of the difference between understanding and not understanding things. I want to bring forward this matter and ask the minister whether there will be a time when an announcement can be made to reopen the scheme to address these things.

Maxine is a very strong Aboriginal woman; she is a leader of her people in the Kimberley. She is the chair of the Derby Aboriginal Health Service. She is also the chair of the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council that looks after the whole of the Kimberley, and she also sits on the national board of the Aboriginal health service. I say again that she asked me to use her name because she is a very strong woman who felt the need to share her story.

**MR A.J. SIMPSON (Darling Range — Minister for Community Services)** [9.19 am]: I thank the member for Kimberley for her grievance and for raising these issues on behalf of her community. I can understand where she is coming from. I grew up in the Kimberley and in 1971 I started grade 1 in Wyndham. I also spent a year at Lombadina Mission in 1975. The Kimberley is very close to my heart. It was interesting to hear the member talk about the Derby Leprosarium, as my mother-in-law worked there as a native welfare officer in the early sixties. I have many connections with the Kimberley.

The member for Kimberley made some points about the Redress WA scheme, which was set up a number of years ago. I think the most important thing about Redress is that people who apply have to relive all the bad times they have been through and put it down on paper. It is a process whereby things that have been buried have to be relived—similar to the Katanning hostel matter to which the member for Albany has referred previously. These are things people have buried very deep for a number of years, and when they are put down on paper, it is relived all over again. This brings up all those issues, as the member explained, that follow on for the rest of these people’s lives.

I acknowledge those who missed the application deadline. It was a long process. There was a 12-month application period for Redress WA, from 1 May 2008 to April 2009. Redress was advertised widely throughout the state in print and electronic media, and was comprehensively promoted by government departments and relevant non-government organisations. Furthermore, Redress WA staff travelled throughout the state to conduct information readings, including visits to the Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne regions. The closing deadline was extended by three months, whereby those who required more time to prepare their applications could submit them until 30 June 2009.

I acknowledge the member’s concerns about people who did not apply because they received less than anticipated and insufficient assistance. As a minister, I still receive letters today—probably about one a month—from people asking to reopen the scheme. Redress WA contracted several service providers statewide to assist applicants and help as many people as it could. This included the Aboriginal Legal Service of WA, the Kimberley Stolen Generation Aboriginal Corporation, the Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service and a number of other organisations to make sure that Redress could get to as many people as possible. It is also relevant to inform members that every applicant received a phone call. Anyone who applied to Redress received a phone call prior to their application being assessed. Applicants were asked whether they wanted to clarify or add information, and they were given support through the process with access to counselling. Overall, the Redress WA communication and application assistance strategies were comprehensive and incorporated a targeted approach to members of the Aboriginal community. Consequently, final figures reveal that about 51 per cent of claimants were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This is a huge issue for the member’s community, especially in the Kimberley. It is also relevant that every applicant who received a phone call was assessed prior to the call being made, and Redress only assessed abuse experienced by applicants when in out-of-home care, and the harm resulting from that.

The member for Kimberley touched on where Maxine and her two sisters find themselves at the moment. I think it is also good to acknowledge that the federal government is currently conducting an inquiry into child abuse, which is taking place as we speak and will move around the country. It will be another opportunity to put forward these issues and is another acknowledgement that these things happened. The member has raised the point that people have missed out, but they want acknowledgement of what happened to them. I think,

importantly, the federal government has recognised this with its inquiry into child abuse throughout Australia. It will give people the opportunity to make their case. People are coming forward to say that they did not get the opportunity to apply to the Redress WA scheme, but they can be involved in the federal government's inquiry.

In summing up, the most important thing to be recognised in the Redress situation is that no amount of money can ever make up for what these people went through in their childhood and whatever happened to them, such as being taken away from their natural parents and put into care as members of the Stolen Generation. I cannot imagine and do not pretend to know what that would be like. No amount of money could ever make up for what has happened to these people.

I acknowledge the member for Kimberley's grievance this morning and I hope to work with her to assist these people. I will definitely take up the member for Kimberley's offer to go with her to the Kimberley. I am looking forward to it. I have a lot of community services and local government things to do there. Hopefully, I can meet with Maxine and talk to her to see whether we can find a way to help her through some of my other departments, and to help community members to move forward and address what happened in years gone by. I thank the member for her grievance and I look forward to working with her.